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The Problem With Mr. Hewett: Academics and Popularizers in American Archeology, c. 1910

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Researches. Believe me, my dear Sir, with sentiments of sincere respect.

Your faithful and obliged servant
J. C. Prichard

CLIO'S FANCY: DOCUMENTS TO PIQUE THE HISTORICAL IMAGINATION

THE PROBLEM WITH MR. HEWETT: ACADEMICS AND POPULARIZERS IN AMERICAN ARCHEOLOGY, c. 1910

Curtis Hinsley
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The current PBS television series on anthropology, Odyssey, raises once again the issue of the relationship between professional anthropologists and the American public. Although anthropology irresistibly attracts, and profits from, public interest, the overt popularizer has always drawn suspicion if not outright hostility from those anxious to uphold professional standards and to fix clear boundaries between professional and public. Such lines began to be emphatically drawn around 1900, with the emergence of important anthropology departments at Harvard, Columbia, and Berkeley. Although the role of boundary-maintainer is usually associated with Franz Boas, who sought unsuccessfully to limit the membership of the American Anthropological Association to a professional elite, Boas' concern was shared by others--and not only in relation to "outsiders" like the photographer Edward Curtis, but also in relation to nominally accredited academic anthropologists who, catering to popular interests, threatened to acquire undue influence with politicians and financiers whose decisions could affect the professional development of the discipline.

One such figure was Edgar Lee Hewett (1865-1946), who while serving as administrative head of the New Mexico Normal School, undertook in 1904 a survey of the prehistoric ruins of the Southwest for the General Land Office of the Department of Interior. This brought him to the attention of the community of American anthropologists, who were increasingly involved with national legislation to preserve the ruins. When Robert Lowie in 1906 declined appointment of the Central American Fellowship of the Archaeological Institute of America, the Fellowship Committee (F. W. Putnam, C. P. Bowditch, and Franz Boas) turned--with some trepidation--to Hewett, despite the fact that he had no prior anthropological training. Over the next ten years Hewett, working chiefly through the Institute's young and boisterous western branches, established a power base that left the Harvard-Columbia professionals amazed and enraged. With his School of American Archaeology at Sante Fe, Hewett in effect ran away with the Southwest as an archeological field, dividing the loyalties even of such Harvard-trained men as Sylvanus G. Morley and A. V. Kidder.

For most academic anthropologists, however, disgust with Hewett became almost a litmus test of professionalism between 1910 and 1912. The case against him was stated in rather caustic terms in a letter to the Boston financier Gardiner Lane written by Alfred M. Tozzer, who as Bowditch's protege had been Hewett's predecessor as A.I.A. Fellow, and was by 1910 a rising star of Harvard's Central American research. While historical retrospect might credit Hewett with the invigoration of a regional cultural awareness, Tozzer--a close ally of Boas in the American Anthropological Association--saw the issue as one of scientific professionalism against irresponsible popular appeal.

October 28, 1910

My dear Mr Lane,

I am quite willing to give you all the information I can in regard to Mr Hewett's "character and ability."

I wish to say however that I have been strongly prejudiced against the man from the very first time I saw him. His personality is one that is especially distasteful to me. To be honest therefore to Hewett my prejudice on the purely personal side should not be overlooked in my estimate of him as a man and as a scientist.

I consider Mr Hewett first of all a politician. He has shown ability in obtaining money for archaeological work and in influencing people to see his side of any case he wishes to present. His power over a certain class of men and especially over women is very great indeed.

He is ambitious, seemingly for the advancement of archaeological work in America, but in reality for personal aggrandizement. His remarkable press agent, whoever he may be, seems to be always alert in spreading broadcast the account of some new find or new work and usually in a manner most spectacular and unscientific. Especially prominent in this respect was a statement of a lecture delivered by Hewett in Colorado in which he told of the discovery of the chronological development of the art of Copan in connection with the dates of the inscriptions worked out independently by his colleague [Morley]. The dates in question have been known for many years and there is abundant evidence to prove that his ideas in regard to the development of the art were borrowed by him from Doctor [H. J.] Spinden whose thesis for the Doctor's degree from Harvard was upon this topic . . . Hewett is a man of great and untiring energy and his perseverance and eagerness in making his point are commendable. The methods however by which he obtains his end are often questionable. He rides over all obstructions roughshod.

I have never heard him acknowledge ignorance of any subject whatsoever connected with [the] field of archaeology either European or American. Where an opportunity has been open to him for advice in regard to special fields of investigations and fields with which he is absolutely unacquainted, he has refrained and in some cases absolutely refused to consult the acknowledged authorities in those fields. This

is especially true in the case of Dr. Boas and the Northwest Coast of America where he planned some work for the Institute. Furthermore, I have never heard him speak other than in the broadest generalities on topics the details of which he pretends to know.

In regard to the character of his work I can speak from experience as I was in the field with him in the summer of 1908 for six weeks. The main criticism in all the excavation made by Hewett is the lack of any well-defined and comprehensive plan of work which would settle once and for all certain broad questions still remaining unanswered concerning the archaeology of the Pueblo region. His work is seemingly done where it will yield the best results from the point of view of collections and spectacular plans and restorations. There has been, as far as I know, little correlation in the many small bits of digging here and there undertaken by Hewett but in almost every case there has resulted a good pottery collection while the work has thrown very little light upon the more important questions of migrations etc. etc. In other words the various pieces of excavation, although in most cases fairly well done, have been made with a view to tangible results for his Museum rather than for scientific data of a more valuable sort. . . .

I must add however that certain of his ideas in regard to a field school of archaeology are excellent, the nightly discussions, strenuous work for the men, and the energy with which the work is done. But his very rigid observance of etiquette and of the superior and exalted position of the "Director" makes the camp seem more like a well disciplined but rigid preparatory school than a place where there was any ease, relaxation and real companionship between the older and younger men. . . .

One of the features of Mr Hewett's work which seems to me especially to be lamented is his influence on the young men whom he has gathered around him. Especially is this the case with Morley and Harrington, the two members, in addition to himself, of the scientific staff of the School. He is said to insist that each member of the staff should turn out six papers each year. These two men have, I think, succeeded in doing this but with questionable results. The papers naturally show the haste of preparation and often amazing immaturity in the treatment of the subject matter. The superficiality of Hewett's own work is to be seen in his writings especially in the article on "The groundwork of American Archaeology" (American Anthropologist, Vol. X, 1908, also published as the first paper of the School of American Archaeology). His thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Geneva shows also imperfect work. It is unnecessary at this time to comment on the amount and character of the work done by Hewett for this degree.

As for Hewett's standing among the American archaeologists I can say, I think, with truth that with the exception of certain people connected with the Bureau of Ethnology and the Smithsonian at Washington together with personal friends in the west there is not a person connected with a scientific institution in the country which is doing work in American anthropology who approves of Hewett's work. I refer, without permission however in every case, to Kroeber of the University

of California, Dorsey of the Field Museum of Chicago, Gordon of the University of Pennsylvania, Goddard and others of the American Museum of Natural History of New York, Boas of Columbia, and Putnam and Dixon of Harvard. These have all expressed at one time or another disapproval of the kind of work Hewett is doing.

The affiliation of the Washington people is easily to be explained by the fact that Hewett who, as I have said, is before everything a politician, has much influence with certain Senators and Congressmen and it is thought that he is thus able to play an important part in the yearly appropriation which makes possible the existence of the Bureau of Ethnology.

I have written thus in detail as I feel very strongly the evil effect of Hewett's work not only upon the good name of the Institute and of Archaeology in general but more especially on that of American Archaeology which has been endeavoring slowly to emerge from the rather forlorn state resulting from unscientific methods and untrained investigators. . . .

Believe me

Sincerely yours

(Alfred M. Tozzer)

(Reproduced from a typed copy, with corrections in Tozzer's handwriting, unsigned, in the Charles P. Bowditch Papers, Peabody Museum Archives. The letter is reproduced here with the kind permission of the Peabody Museum Archives and Mrs. Joan Tozzer Cave.)

HARVARD UNIVERSITY HISTORY OF ANTHROPOLOGY COLLOQUIUM

A Colloquium on the history of anthropology has been meeting since February in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Speakers so far have included:

- March 12 Ben Finney (University of Hawaii), "Wind, Sea and Stars: Recreating Ancient Polynesian Navigation"
- March 19 Stephen Williams (Harvard University), "The BAE Mound Exploration Division, 1881-1891"
- April 2 Michael Hammond (University of Toronto), "Combat Anthropology and Evolutionary Thinking in Late 19th Century France: DeMortillet and His Opponents"
- April 2 Curtis M. Hinsley, Jr. (Colgate University), "Digging and Trenching for the 'Boston Men': F. W. Putnam and the Debate over Ancient Man in New Jersey and Ohio, 1875-1900"
- April 9 Joan Mark (Harvard University), "Early Studies of American Indian Music"